

THE DIRECTOR OF CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE

WASHINGTON, D.C. 20505

National Intelligence Officers

1 June 1979

MEMORANDUM FOR: Director of Central Intelligence

VIA : Robert R. Bowie
Deputy Director for National Foreign Assessment

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FROM : [REDACTED]
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SUBJECT : Monthly Warning Assessment: USSR-EE

Summary

Community analysts, meeting on 22 May, saw the Soviet dilemma in Afghanistan as worsening. Some believed a sudden collapse could occur unexpectedly during the coming month which would make it impossible for the Soviets to continue to defer a decision as to whether or not to commit ground combat forces to rescue the regime. While most analysts thought that in such dire circumstances the Soviets would probably decide not to commit the large forces that would be required to reconquer and hold the country, a limited rescue operation to hold the city of Kabul for Taraki was considered marginally more possible. Specialists cited recent evidence as suggesting a dramatic increase in Soviet leadership infighting as Brezhnev's health declines and the succession draws closer. Analysts thought it likely that the Soviets before the US-Soviet summit would announce agreement to meet with the Chinese to discuss principles of the Sino-Soviet relationship, but foresaw a considerable period of Soviet sceptical testing of Chinese intentions even after such a meeting convened. [REDACTED]

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1. Community analysts see the civil war in Afghanistan now emerging as the most pressing and intractable short-term Soviet security problem and the Soviet dilemma as worsening. The general view expressed was that the local Afghan security situation was continuing to deteriorate, and that the levels

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of assistance the Soviets are providing do not appear to be reversing this trend. [REDACTED]

[REDACTED] views differed as to how close we are likely to be to a crisis that would force an unambiguous Soviet decision on whether or not to intervene with combat forces. Some analysts, however, considered it quite possible that a sharp collapse could occur unexpectedly during the coming month which would make it impossible for the Soviets to continue to defer such a decision. [REDACTED]

While no analyst would rule out the possibility that the Soviets might then opt to send in ground combat forces, the majority of community Soviet experts now seemed increasingly to feel that if worse came to worst, the Soviets would probably not do so. The scope of the military operation that would be required, the likelihood of an extremely protracted and bloody struggle, and the various highly adverse international effects that could be expected were all cited as reasons the USSR might in the end decide to refrain. Some analysts suggested, however, that in the event that Kabul should become isolated by widespread further military deterioration, the Soviets would have the option of seeking to hold the capital for the Taraki regime by dispatching an airmobile combat team, and that this would entail fewer adverse military and political consequences than an attempt to reconquer the entire country. [REDACTED]

2. Sino-Soviet.

Turning to the other extreme of the tendencies in the Sino-Soviet relationship, analysts considered the possibilities raised by the recent exchange of notes between the USSR and China over a Chinese proposal to hold a meeting to discuss the "basic principles" of the relationship. The consensus thought it likely that before the US-Soviet summit the Soviets would indicate agreement to hold such a Sino-Soviet

meeting, for maximum impact on the US. While noting the important consequences for the US that would flow from any significant improvement in Sino-Soviet relations, the consensus did not see any meaningful change as likely in the near future. Analysts expected a protracted period of sceptical testing of mutual intentions and jockeying for tactical advantage.

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3. Soviet Leadership. Analysts were struck by recent evidence suggesting a dramatic increase in leadership infighting relating to the Brezhnev succession. One Moscow newspaper has published a doctored picture of the Soviet leaders atop Lenin's tomb for the May Day celebrations; this picture had been crudely altered to remove Kirilenko, Brezhnev's heir-apparent, from the leadership lineup. The next day all other Soviet newspapers published the same picture unaltered, with Kirilenko in place. Such blatant tampering with leadership symbols had not been seen in Moscow since Khrushchev was removed, and is strong evidence of increased tensions in the Politburo as Brezhnev's health declines and the point of leadership change draws closer. The Community should remain alert for further such evidence of instability at the top, which may surface more frequently from now on.

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4. Yugoslav Leadership. The even greater uncertainty about the succession to Tito was underlined when the man whom some analysts had once regarded as Tito's heir-apparent -- Stane Dolanc -- was dropped from the Yugoslav party Secretariat on the eve of Tito's visit to the USSR. Analysts' opinions differed on the implications of this change. While some saw it as a blow to Dolanc's position in post-Tito Yugoslavia, others disagreed, pointing to the fact that Tito took Dolanc with him to the USSR, as well as to recent evidence suggesting that he has been given new responsibilities for ideological supervision within the party. The balance of opinion was that Dolanc's power position has probably been improved somewhat, probably much to the disappointment of the Soviets. Dolanc has been one of the Yugoslav leaders who has been particularly critical of the USSR. In view of the possibility that there could well be a coincidental change in both leaderships in the next year, it will be increasingly important from now on for community collectors to strive to obtain any evidence bearing on the reaction of individual Soviet leaders to shifts and jockeying in Belgrade.

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